



Home COVID tests to be covered by insurers starting Saturday

By ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Starting Saturday, private health insurers will be required to cover up to eight home COVID-19 tests per month for people on their plans. The Biden administration announced the change Monday as it looks to lower costs and make testing for the virus more convenient amid rising frustrations. Under the new policy, first detailed to the AP, Americans will be able to either purchase home testing kits for free under their insurance or submit receipts for the tests for reimbursement, up to the monthly per-person limit.

A family of four, for instance, could be reimbursed for up to 32 tests per month. PCR tests and rapid tests ordered or administered by a health provider will continue to be fully covered by insurance with no limit. President Joe Biden faced

criticism over the holiday season for a shortage of at-home rapid tests as Americans traveled to see family amid the surge in cases from the more transmissible omicron variant. Now the administration is working to make COVID-19 home tests more accessible, both by increasing supply and bringing down costs. Later this month, the federal government will launch a website to begin making 500 million at-home COVID-19 tests available via mail. The administration also is scaling up emergency rapid-testing sites in areas experiencing the greatest surges in cases.

The insurer-covered testing would dramatically reduce costs for many Americans, and the administration hopes that by easing a barrier to more regular at-home testing, it can help slow the spread of the virus, get kids back into school



Associated Press

more quickly and help people gather safely. "This is all part of our overall strategy to ramp up access to easy-to-use, at-home tests at no cost," Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said in

a statement. "By requiring private health plans to cover people's at-home tests, we are further expanding Americans' ability to get tests for free when they need them." Biden announced the fed-

eral requirement late last year, and it kicks in on Jan. 15, but the administration had been silent until now on details of the plan.

Continued on Page 2

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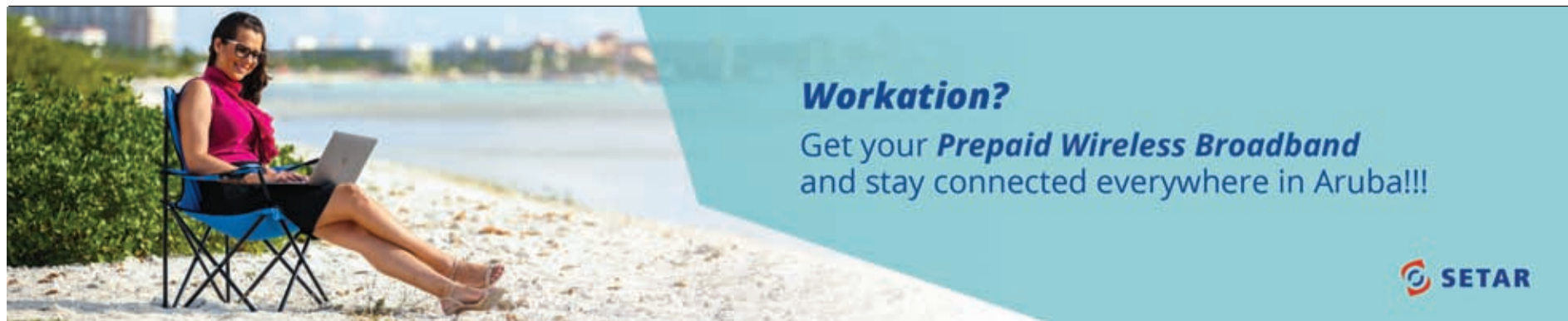
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Home COVID tests to be covered by insurers starting Saturday

Continued from Front

The administration is trying to incentivize private insurers to cover the tests up-front and without a cumbersome reimbursement process. Insurance plans that work with pharmacies and retailers to cover the up-front costs of the tests will be required to reimburse only up to \$12 per test if purchased through an out-of-network retailer. Plans that don't move proactively to set up a network of pharmacies would have to cover the full retail price that the customer paid — which could be more than \$12 per test. The two main health insurance industry groups said insurers would carry out the administration's order, but cautioned consumers it

won't be as easy as flipping a switch.

"Health insurance providers will work as quickly as possible to implement this guidance in ways that limit consumer confusion and challenges," Matt Eyles, president of America's Health Insurance Plans, said in a statement. "While there will likely be some hiccups in early days, we will work with the administration to swiftly address issues as they arise."

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association had a more direct response. "We are concerned that the policy does not solve for the limited supply of tests in the country and could cause additional consumer friction as insurers stand up a program in just four days' time," Kim Keck, the group's

president, said in a statement.

Both groups said they support provisions in the Biden administration plan to counteract potential price gouging on tests.

Only tests purchased on or after Jan. 15 will be required to be reimbursed, the administration said. Some insurers may choose to cover the costs of at-home tests purchased earlier, but they won't have to. Mina Bressler, a mother of two and a therapist in San Mateo, California, was able to buy rapid test kits online and shared some with a parent who works in the service industry and doesn't have time to "sit at her computer every hour refreshing the Walmart page to see when tests are in stock."

"I gave her some and her kids went to school. That's one time and there's a million of her," Bressler said.

"Just like vaccines becoming available really shone a light on the inequity of what's going on in this pandemic, I think testing is the new flashlight for that because who's going online stalking Walmart? It's not the most vulnerable people in the county," Bressler added.

Americans on Medicare won't be able to get tests reimbursed through the federal insurance plan, but Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program plans are required to cover the cost of at-home tests fully. Those who are not on a covered insurance plan can receive free tests through the forthcoming federal website or from some local community centers and pharmacies. □

As Mardi Gras nears, New Orleans brings back mask mandate

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans will reinstitute an indoor mask mandate to fight the spread of COVID-19 while readying for an influx of visitors for the Mardi Gras season, the city health director said Tuesday.

Dr. Jennifer Avegno said the mandate takes effect Wednesday at 6 a.m. and will apply to participants in the annual Mardi Gras balls that take place in the city.

Avegno said Louisiana's statewide coronavirus daily hospitalization numbers have grown in three weeks "by a factor of seven." She said those cases have put a strain on hospitals, with emergency room waits as long as 12 hours in some facilities.

Growing numbers of coronavirus cases, driven by the omicron variant can affect treatment for people seeking treatment for other illnesses or injuries, Avegno said.

And, while Avegno said she's hoping cases will subside in coming weeks, she added hospitalizations and deaths show up weeks after cases are reported. That could mean continued pressure from coronavirus cases about the time emergency rooms face an annual uptick in patient numbers as Mardi Gras nears and tourists, some of them overindulging in alcohol, flood the city.

Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday, falls on March 1 this year. Major parades, which draw as many as a million locals and visitors to city streets, begin in the last two weeks of February.

The city already has a requirement that people show proof of vaccinations or negative tests for entry into bars, restaurants and numerous other venues.

Mardi Gras in 2020 became what officials later realized was an early Southern superspreader of COVID-19. Festivities were largely canceled last year. This year, officials are determined to proceed with Mardi Gras events, while enforcing vaccine and testing requirements.

The state health department said Tuesday that just over 1,900 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 in Louisiana as of Monday, up from about 200 in mid-December. □

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Bank of America slashes fees for account overdrafts

By KEN SWEET

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Bank of America is slashing the amount it charges customers when they spend more than they have in their accounts and plans to eliminate entirely its fees for bounced checks.

It's the latest move by the nation's biggest banks to roll back the overdraft fees they long charged customers, fees that often amount to hundreds of dollars a year for frequent overdraft users.

The bank based in Charlotte, North Carolina, will cut the overdraft fees it charges customers to \$10 from \$35 starting in May. It will also stop charging fees for non-sufficient funds — which are levied when it rejects a transaction — better known as bouncing a check.

While checks are no longer widely used, NSF fees can come from automated payments like utility bills. Bank of America, the nation's second-largest bank, says roughly 25% of its overdraft/NSF fee revenue each year came from NSF fees. Overdraft fees typically come when someone makes a purchase on a debit card that exceeds the available cash in their account.

Altogether, Bank of America estimates the steps will cut its overdraft-fee revenues by 97% from where they were in 2009, the year before it started taking incremental steps toward reining in overdraft-fee revenues.

"This is the final step in the journey we've been on," said Holly O'Neill, president of retail banking at BofA, in an interview. "We have good financial solutions for clients without them having to rely on overdraft, but we will still have overdraft if it is needed."

For years, it was common that one large bank would increase the fee it was charging for overdraft, which would cause other banks to respond in kind. It remains to be seen whether the decision by BofA — a leader in the retail banking

industry — to cut overdraft fees will pressure other banks to take similar measures.

The bank is also eliminating two smaller fees as well. It will no longer allow customers to overdraft their accounts at the ATM and will eliminate a \$12 fee it charged customers when the bank automatically moved money from one account to another to avoid an overdraft, often moving money from a long-term savings account into the customers' primary checking.

Overdraft has its origins in banks providing a service for a fee to customers who may have not balanced their checkbook correctly and wanted a bank to honor a purchase. But the widespread use of debit cards changed this courtesy into a routine source of revenue for banks.

If a customer lacked funds in their account, a \$5 coffee could end up costing \$35 because of overdraft fees.

Overdraft fees became lucrative for the industry but at the same time made banks a target for consumer advocates and regulators. After the financial crisis, Democrats put the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and other regulators in charge of reining in overdraft fee revenue. The CFPB under President Biden has decided to take another look at overdraft fee practices.

"For many big banks, overdraft fees are still the steady, reliable, predictable, easy revenue that shareholders love," said Rohit Chopra, the CFPB's director, in December.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts and a long-time critic of banking practices like overdraft fees, called BofA's announcement "a step in the right direction" on Twitter.

"Big banks should eliminate these fees altogether," Warren said.

For years, BofA has slowly cut back on its overdraft fee practices. It got rid of overdraft fees tied to debit card purchases in

2010 and created a checking account in 2014 that did not allow customers to overdraft. The SafeBalance account is now the bank's most commonly opened account.

But BofA and the broader industry were not ready to get rid of overdraft fees altogether until recently. Many banks froze the fees they charged customers during the first year of the pandemic and industry still booked record profits. While overdraft fees fell for the first time in six years in 2020, the industry still collected over \$30 billion in fees from such practices that year.

So starting in 2021, some larger banks started announcing they were dropping overdraft fees entirely.



Associated Press

Ally Bank, PNC, Santander and Capital One were among the bigger regional banks to effectively eliminate overdraft fees. JPMorgan Chase also eased its overdraft practicing, giving customers more leeway to go negative in their ac-

counts before fees would be charged.

Bank of America will report its fourth-quarter results on Jan. 19, which will give investors and the public a full-year view on how much the bank is still bringing in from fees like overdraft. □

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Hospital helper nearly overlooks brother after NYC fire

By **BOBBY CAINA CALVAN**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The man on the gurney looked so familiar, but in the commotion of a big-city emergency room, Yusupha Jawara quickly turned his attention back to other people seeking medical help at St. Barnabas Hospital.

After a deadly blaze broke out at a Bronx apartment building, Jawara, who lives nearby, rushed to the scene and helped transport people to the hospital. But as Sunday wore on, his concern about his family began to grow. His brother Hagi did not answer the phone. Neither did his sister-in-law.

Then he thought back to that brief glance of the man whose hair and partially masked face looked so much like his brother. It couldn't be, he thought. Surely, his brother would have been safe on the 18th floor, far from the fire that started 15 stories below.

"I was just helping the EMS transport one person to the hospital when I saw him — somebody similar like him — on a stretcher being brought to the ER," Jawara said Tuesday as his fam-



Associated Press

ily began making funeral plans for their loved ones. "At that time, I didn't have the focus to know that it was him."

Jawara's brother and sister-in-law, Isatou, were among the 17 people who died as they tried to flee through thick, suffocating smoke that rose through the stairwell of the 19-story tower. The victims of the city's deadliest fire in more than three decades included eight children, three of

them from one family that tried to make it down to safety but perished in the smoke.

Fire officials say a malfunctioning electric space heater started the blaze, which damaged only a small part of the building. But smoke engulfed the complex after tenants fleeing the unit where the flames began left the apartment door open behind them in their hurry to escape.

Spring-loaded hinges that

were supposed to shut the door automatically did not work. A second door also left open in a stairwell higher up acted as a flue, sucking smoke upward and blocking residents from escaping. Among the dead were three children of Haja Dukuray and Hagi Dukuray, originally from Gambia, according to Hagi Dukuray, the uncle of Haja Dukuray. The uncle told The Associated Press he did not know if the children's parents survived.

"This is a very close-knit community. We are predominantly from one town in the Gambia called Alunghare, so we are all family," said Dukuray, who drove to the Bronx from his home in Delaware on Monday. "Most of the people here, we are all related in one way or the other."

Many people in the building were also members of the same congregation, he added, "so it's like one big family."

Gambia's president, Adama Barrow, expressed "profound sadness" about the loss of life.

"We are keenly following the developments through our embassy in the United States," Barrow said as he extended condolences to the families of the dead and wished speedy recoveries to those who were injured.

Fire Commissioner Daniel Nigro said the apartment's front door and a door on the 15th floor should have been self-closing and blunted the spread of smoke, but the doors stayed fully open. It was not clear if the doors failed mechanically or if they had been manually disabled. □

Brrr! Some schools close as extreme cold grips US Northeast



Associated Press

By **MARK PRATT**

Associated Press

A mass of arctic air swept into the Northeast on Tuesday, bringing bone-chilling sub-zero temperatures and closing schools across the region for the second time in less than a week.

Schools in Massachusetts' three largest cities — Boston, Worcester and Spring-

field — canceled classes, saying they did not want children standing outside for extended periods of time waiting for buses.

"There has been an increase of covid with transportation personnel, which would result in buses running up to 30 minutes late," according to a tweet from the Worcester public

schools. "The safety of our students and staff are always the focus of our decisions." Low temperatures can result in frostbite to exposed skin in as little as 30 minutes, according to the National Weather Service. Syracuse, New York, Manchester, New Hampshire, and Burlington, Vermont, were among communities that also closed public schools. The closures came just a few days after many school closed because of snow Friday.

The freezing temperatures were caused by a pocket of cold air descending from Canada, but the good news is that it is expected to be a short-lived cold spell, said Bill Simpson, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Norton, Massachusetts, office. "We're getting an arc-

tic cold front with northwest flow, quickly switching to a southwest flow," he said, adding temperatures are expected to rise to around 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4.5 C) in the Boston area later in the week. Wind chill temperatures in areas near lakes Erie and Ontario in New York state were expected to drop as low as minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 34 Celsius) by the afternoon. To make matters worse, parts of the state were expected to be hit with up to 2 feet (0.6 meters) of lake-effect snow and winds gusting up to 40 mph (64 kph).

The high temperature in Vermont on Tuesday was expected to be several degrees below zero in some areas with wind chills of up to minus 35 (minus 37 C). In New Hampshire, it was

minus 26 degrees (minus 32 C) atop Mount Washington — known for its weather extremes — with a wind chill of nearly minus 72 (minus 58 C) as of 8 a.m. That was actually warmer than earlier in the morning.

The Mount Washington Observatory posted a photo on Facebook of a frozen plate of spaghetti supporting a fork.

Temperatures dropped into the single digits Fahrenheit in many areas of Massachusetts, with the wind chill making it feel well below zero. The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services announced Monday that four COVID-19 testing sites overseen by the state would be closed Tuesday because of the cold. The sites are in Claremont, Manchester, Nashua and Newington. □

Israeli PM: Omicron unstoppable but no need for 'hysteria'

By LAURIE KELLMAN

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP)—Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Tuesday tried to calm Israelis anxious about the rapid spread of the omicron variant, insisting the government is managing the crisis better than most and ruling out a national shutdown. Bennett said during an evening press conference that Israel was weathering an "unstoppable storm" of infection by protecting the most vulnerable people and keeping the economy open. He also called on people to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves, their children and older relatives.

More than 400,000 vulnerable Israelis — mostly people over 60 — have gotten a fourth coronavirus vaccination and hospitals are prepared for an influx of severe illness. Bennett argued that these steps are evidence the situation is under control.

"There's no place for panic.



Associated Press

There's no place for hysteria. We will get through this together," Bennett said, adding that the government is handling a once-in-a-lifetime crisis "in the right and responsible way."

He spoke after a poll for Israel's Channel 12 showed nearly two-thirds of Israelis viewed the government's

handling of the crisis poorly. Bennett has warned that between 2 million and 4 million people among Israel's population of 9.4 million people are expected to be infected by the variant.

On Tuesday, he said the government's focus is on keeping seniors safe through vaccines and re-

serving newly developed drugs for them.

With massive lines clogging testing centers, he also urged people to avoid taking PCR tests unless they absolutely have to, so they can use them for the elderly. Instead, he recommended that people try to use home antigen tests, which

are seen as less accurate but ease the burden on testing centers.

In Israel as in other countries, the variant has shattered infection records but appears to cause less severe illness and death — especially among vaccinated people.

Pandemic policy has shifted dramatically in recent months, causing public confusion over airport policy, testing, quarantines and whether and how to send kids to school.

Bennett acknowledged that Israel is in the midst of an unstoppable wave. He said there is no democratic country that can stop this.

"We are in a situation that happens once in an era, and we are managing it in the right and responsible way," he said, accusing his political opponents of trying to create "unjustified hysteria."

"The situation in Israel is managed better than almost all of the world," he added. "Look around." □

China locks down 3rd city, raising affected to 20 million

By KEN MORITSUGU

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A third Chinese city has locked down its residents because of a COVID-19 outbreak, raising the number confined to their homes in China to about 20 million people.

The lockdown of Anyang, home to 5.5 million people, was announced late Monday after two cases of the omicron variant were reported. Residents are not allowed to go out and stores have been ordered shut except those selling necessities.

Another 13 million people have been locked down in Xi'an for nearly three weeks, and 1.1 million more in Yuzhou for more than a week. It wasn't clear how long the lockdown of Anyang would last, as it was announced as a measure to facilitate mass testing of residents, which is standard procedure in China's strategy of identifying and isolating infected people as quickly as possible.

The lockdowns are the broadest since the shutting down of Wuhan and most of the rest of Hubei province in early 2020 at the start of the pandemic. Since then, China's approach has evolved into one of targeting smaller areas hit by outbreaks for lockdowns.

The approach of the Winter Olympics, which open Feb. 4 in Beijing, and the emergence of omicron have brought back citywide lockdowns in a bid to snuff out outbreaks and prevent them from spreading to other parts of China.

A Beijing Olympics official responsible for disease control, Huang Chun, said organizers are counting on the cooperation of athletes and officials to prevent an outbreak that could affect participation.

"If the mass cluster transmission happens, it will impact the Games and the schedule for sure," Huang said. "The worst scenario, if it happens, is independent

of man's will, so we leave our options open."

In Hong Kong, city leader Carrie Lam announced the closure of kindergartens and primary schools after infections were reported in students. Schools are to close by Friday and remain shut until at least the Lunar New Year holiday in the first week of February.

The semiautonomous Chinese city has tightened pandemic-related restrictions in recent days after discovering the omicron variant had spread beyond people arriving from overseas.

The Anyang omicron cases are believed to be linked to two other cases found Saturday in Tianjin. It appears to be the first time omicron has spread in mainland China beyond people who arrived from abroad and their immediate contacts. Anyang is an important archeological site, the ancient capital of the Shang dynasty and where the earliest Chinese writing has



Associated Press

been found on what are called oracle bones.

The city said that non-essential vehicles are banned from streets in a lockdown notice shared online by state media late Monday. The number of cases is still relatively low, with 58 new ones confirmed from the start of Monday to 8 a.m. Tuesday morning.

Tianjin, a major port that is less than an hour from Beijing by high-speed rail, has locked down only affected areas as it carries out mass testing. As of noon Tuesday, 97 people had tested posi-

tive in the city of 14 million people: 49 with symptoms, 15 without symptoms and 33 awaiting further verification.

Xi'an and Yuzhou are both battling the delta variant and neither has reported any omicron cases.

More than 2,000 people have been infected in Xi'an in China's largest outbreak since the initial one in Wuhan. The ancient capital is a popular tourist stop that is home to the Terracotta Warriors ruins and also a Samsung computer chip factory. □

Kremlin: Not much optimism after Russia-US talks on Ukraine

By **DASHA LITVINOVA** and **VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV**

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — The Kremlin said Tuesday the security talks with the U.S. amid tensions over Ukraine have given little reason for optimism, adding that Russia would wait for the outcome of other meetings this week before deciding whether it's worth to continue negotiations.

The leader of the U.S. delegation at Monday's talks briefed allies in Brussels about the session and stressed the security crisis was "caused by Russia" and its troop buildup near Ukraine. At the Geneva talks, Moscow insisted on guarantees to halt NATO's eastward expansion and even roll back the military alliance's deployments in Eastern Europe, while Washington firmly rejected the demands as a nonstarter. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that while the talks were "open, comprehensive and direct," he emphasized that it's the result that matters.

"So far, let's say we see no



Associated Press

significant reason for optimism," he said in a conference call with reporters.

The Geneva talks are being followed by a round of Russia-NATO talks in Brussels on Wednesday and a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna on Thursday. "There are still several rounds (of talks) ahead of us, which will allow us to work out a clearer understanding, a clearer picture of where we stand

with the Americans," Peskov said, adding that those discussions would determine whether it would make sense to continue the negotiations.

He noted that Russia isn't setting any deadlines for the talks but wouldn't accept dragging them out. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also emphasized that Moscow expects a quick Washington's answer to its demands.

The negotiations were held amid soaring tensions over a Russian troop buildup near Ukraine's border that has stoked fears of a possible invasion. Russia has denied it has plans to attack its neighbor but pressed for legal guarantees that NATO deny membership to Ukraine and other former Soviet countries, as well as roll back the alliance's military deployments in Central and Eastern Europe. Russian President Vladimir

Putin has warned that Moscow would take unspecified "military-technical measures" if the U.S. and its allies fail to meet the demands. Putin on Tuesday held a video call with members of his Security Council, saying in brief introductory remarks that he wanted to discuss unspecified issues related to security and infrastructure in border areas. The U.S. and its allies have roundly rejected the demand for NATO not to admit Ukraine or any other new members, emphasizing that a key alliance principle is that membership is open to any qualifying country and no outsiders have veto power. At the same time, Washington and NATO say they are ready to discuss arms control, confidence-building measures, greater transparency and risk reduction if Russia takes a constructive stance.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, who led the U.S. delegation in Geneva, said she briefed the North Atlantic Council on the discussions. □

Russia: Infections could surge 6 times higher due to omicron

By **DASHA LITVINOVA**

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian officials on Tuesday sounded the alarm about a looming surge of coronavirus infections due to the highly contagious omicron variant, but stopped short of announcing new restrictions in a hard-hit country where very few limits are in place.

Russia already has by far Europe's highest pandemic toll at over 317,000 dead. The warning on Tuesday comes just weeks after new infections and deaths in Russia began to decline following another record-breaking surge.

Pessimistic estimates suggest that Russia might face six-figure numbers of daily new infections, according to Anna Popova, head of Russia's public health agency Rospotrebnadzor.

Experts already see indica-



Associated Press

tions that the situation with the virus is worsening, Popova added infection rates in 35 out of more than 80 Russian regions are higher than the country's average.

Russia this year has been reporting between 15,000 and 18,000 new infections a day, compared to December's rate of about 30,000 daily cases. The country's state coronavirus task force has registered over 10.6

million confirmed infections and 317,618 deaths overall. Russia's state statistics agency, which uses broader counting criteria, puts the death toll much higher, saying the overall number of virus-linked deaths between April 2020 and October 2021 was over 625,000. Health officials have reported only 305 confirmed cases of omicron so far, but Russian Health Minister

Mikhail Murashko said there have been cases of community spread. Popova on Tuesday said the variant was registered in 13 Russian regions, including the country's biggest cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said Tuesday that omicron is spreading fast in the Russian capital.

"Within 7-10 days, I believe, we will be seeing a significant surge in infections," Sobyenin said, adding that the virus situation in Moscow might become even more "critical" that it was during previous surges.

Moscow health officials reported 4,635 new cases of COVID-19 Tuesday, a toll almost twice as high as the previous day. Russia saw 17,525 new infections on Tuesday up from 15,830 on Monday.

Despite the warning signs,

no new restrictions were announced and it remained unclear if there are plans to introduce any. Russia had only one nationwide lockdown in 2020, and in October many Russians were ordered to stay off work for a week amid a surge of infections and deaths, but generally the authorities have resisted shutting down businesses or imposing any tough restrictions. Russian lawmakers late last year introduced legislation restricting access to public places to those who have been vaccinated, recovered or medically exempt from getting a jab, but the law hasn't yet passed all three readings in parliament.

Similar restrictions already exist in some Russian regions, but are often loosely implemented. In others, they were relaxed ahead of the New Year holidays. □

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Poland hits milestone of 100,000 deaths from COVID-19

By VANESSA GERA

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) —

Poland has become the latest European nation to reach the sad milestone of 100,000 deaths related to the coronavirus.

Nearly a quarter of those deaths — some 24,000 — occurred in the most recent wave of infection that began in October, a period in which vaccines have been widely available in the European Union nation of 38 million people.

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski said Tuesday that 493 more people with COVID-19 had died, pushing the overall pandemic death toll to 100,254 in the central European nation.

The bleak marker comes as daily new infections have fallen following a

peak in what officials call the country's "fourth wave" of COVID-19 driven by the delta variant. But with the omicron variant spreading, another large infection wave is looming. The first two deaths from omicron were reported Monday, both in elderly and unvaccinated people. Niedzielski said over 18,000 COVID-19 patients are hospitalized, making this "the most difficult situation compared to other waves."

Poland has struggled through the pandemic with a health care sector strapped by limited funding and the emigration of many medical professionals to Western Europe in the past two decades.

According to OECD statistics, Poland is the EU nation with the lowest number of

working doctors in proportion to its population — just 2.4 to 1,000 inhabitants compared with 4.5 in Germany. Poland also has only 5 nurses to 1,000 inhabitants, below the EU average of 8 and far below richer countries like Germany, which has 14.

The vast majority of COVID-19 deaths in the last wave — 83% — are of unvaccinated people. Among people under 44, more than 90% of those who died were not vaccinated. The vaccination rate in Poland is nearly 56% — a much lower rate than in the countries of western Europe but much higher than some other central European countries, like Bulgaria and Romania.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's government



Associated Press

has sought to encourage vaccinations but is also up against fears and hesitancy among some in the population — and sometimes among the governing Law and Justice party's own supporters.

In recent days, a school superintendent and party

loyalist in the province surrounding Krakow, Barbara Nowak, said she opposed making vaccines compulsory for teachers, an idea supported by the health minister. She claimed that "the consequences of this experiment are not fully established." □

Romania pushes to add climate change education in schools

By STEPHEN McGRATH

Associated Press

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) —

Romania's president wants to add sections on climate change and environmental issues to the national school curriculum to enable students to learn more about the challenges the world faces from climate change.

President Klaus Iohannis on Tuesday launched a public debate over a 141-page proposal and attended a meeting at the presidential palace on it with Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuica, Romania's environment and education ministers, teachers, students and nongovernmental organizations.

The report suggests increasing the amount of climate change and environmental education that students receive, creating a national network of 10,000 envi-

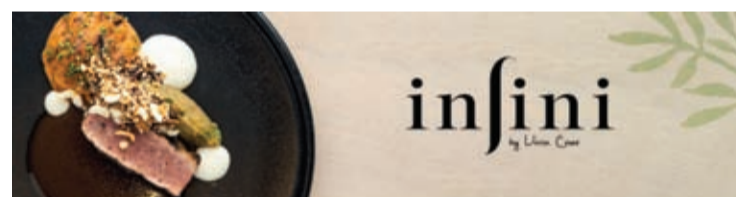
ronmental 'mini inspectors,' supporting nature-based activities, and creating digital learning materials on climate change.

Longer-term goals in the report include improving the sustainability of school infrastructure and cutting schools' carbon footprints in half by 2030.

"Education is one of the pillars of improving the response to climate change, as education leads to changes in human behavior, in the sense of a greater responsibility to protect nature and the future of society as a whole," Iohannis said Tuesday.

"What we want more than anything else is to pave the way for a change of mindset ... we all want a clean, waste-free environment," he added. Gabriel Paun, president of the environmental group Agent Green,

welcomed the report and said it's of "utmost necessity." "Our generation has failed to save the climate but at least we can give the next one a chance to fight with the best available tool — which is education," he told The Associated Press. He said Romanian politicians now "lack ambition" in efforts to tackle climate change. According to the European Commission, 41% of Romania's Recovery and Resilience Plan funds from the EU — 29.2 billion euros (\$33.1 billion) — are allocated to "measures that support the green transition," including phasing out coal power over the next decade. "Even though we still have a long way to go in the public consultation process ... the report presented today allows us to start preparing now," said Ciuica, the prime minister. □



Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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LOCAL



For Don and Susan Hearn, Aruba has been a family tradition for almost 50 years

EAGLE BEACH – There must be something special about Aruba that keeps the Hearn's coming for almost 50 years. And yes it's the perfect weather, the beautiful beaches, the amazing restaurants, the hospitality of its people, the resort and most important their family.

Don and Susan Hearn are from Canada. Their love for Aruba started since 1973. It was love at first site. They fell in love with it and have been coming ever since during Christmas time and other times for over 56 times. The first 15 years they stayed at the Manchebo Beach Resort, Talk of the Town, Tamarijn and when they started building La Quinta Beach Resort they purchased a timeshare during pre-construction in 1988 and moved in the next year and have been there ever since.

La Quinta is simply their home away from home. The resort has seen their entire family grow. From their sons who have been coming since 1978. After their sons married, their wives started coming and off course the Grandchildren couldn't have been left behind. They love the peacefulness they find at the resort and the many familiar faces they see each year again. Strangers who've become more like friends and family throughout the years. 50 years of unforgettable memories.

Another special bond they have to La Quinta is the many years of friendship with our current Minister of Integrity, Nature, Transport and Elderly Care, Mr. Ursell Arends. They are so proud of seeing Ursell grow into this fine gentleman and all that he has accomplished. Whenever they are here Ursell never misses the chance to pass by and spend quality time with them.

Last year they couldn't come due to Covid, but this year nothing was going to stop their family tradition from coming to their beloved island. There were lots of travel procedures and protocols to follow and despite arriving here on Christmas day, they found the whole process went by smoothly. Despite the increase in numbers they still feel very safe being here. Protocols are in place and they avoided crowded places and ate at restaurants who offered outdoor dining.

This year was another special one, since Grandma Susan's celebrated her 75th Birthday. She had many birthday celebrations and this one was a very happy one. January is a busy birthday month for the Hearn's. Grandma is January 2nd, son Donald, January 6th and Grandson Conner, January 12th. The entire family is looking forward in continuing this family tradition for many years to come.

To the Hearn's vacationing in Aruba is all about quality family time, infinite memories, good company and the best life has to offer. □



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The Kitchen Table enters seventh year of gastronomy with raving reviews: “The devil is in the details; we are in praise.”

EAGLE BEACH — While in Aruba do yourself a favor and experience a night at The Kitchen Table. This is an elegant, classy, intimate, high-quality restaurant with an exceptional dining set-up. Dining here is an experience, a kind of sitting- at your- best- friend's or family's kitchen table where you feel and taste that the food contains love. The extra mile the owners and staff go has everything to do with running this lovely restaurant in a sincere, authentic way. In Spanish they say: ‘Mi casa es tu casa’ meaning my house is your house and that describes exactly what you will feel during a night at The Kitchen Table.

The 8-course ecstatic food trip starts with a warm welcome and sparkling wine at the patio of The Kitchen Table's new location at Paradise Beach Villas as of 6.00PM. The chef's table concept is happening on the second floor of the owners' restaurant Asi Es Mi Peru, another highly recommended establishment. But we are here now to guide you through the concept of The Kitchen Table, so let's go. Taking you upstairs is literally taking you into an ambiance of warmth, coziness, classic elegance, and intimacy. You are treated like queen and king while sitting in noble chairs at a



huge table. Owners Roxanna Salinas and Jan van Nes are warm and welcoming hosts and Chef David Lizano and Sous-Chef Xalsky Schwengle enthusiastically share their deep knowledge of the beautiful dishes that will be presented to you. Get ready to dive into the tastebuds tickling journey to the Caribbean, Peruvian and international cuisine. To pair the perfect wines three sommeliers were invited to make the selection.

Table full foodies

The restaurant just got its new menu out, so this is the time to reserve your spot at the table. A Caribbean Peruvian Snack Trio is the enchanting first appetizer existing of a Chicken Empanada, Crab & Shrimp Eggroll and a Cucumber & Tuna Nikkei. This is paired with a delicate Ruffino Oviato (Italy), just perfect. Taking us to the next round we are presented a Mahi Mahi Tartare, delicious and combined with the Spanish Santiago Ruiz Albarino, we are in heaven. What follows is a personal favorite, the Beef Tataki with Quinoa accompanied by La Fage, Miraflores Rose wine from France. This is an amazing dish. In between the courses the owner and chef explain about the ingredients, prepara-

tion, and origins of the dishes in turns, it is truly an interesting and exciting presentation. The Peruvian Red Snapper Casserole is a surprising, wonderful tasting and in complete balance with the USA Cline Viognier from Sonoma Coast. My American-Ecuadorian neighbor was thrilled with this dish and who would be a better judge than she, after all she is from the region. The guests are clearly having a good time and we are in awe so far. The Kitchen Table builds this evening in an upward trend, and we proceed with Scallops and Shrimps within a Risotto of green Peas Puree with a foam of Coconut Milk Sauce. A mouth-melting experience and added to the culinary joy is a USA wine from Yolo County, Phantom Chardonnay. From the Caribbean, Peru we travel to Argentina presented to us with a Veal in her Jus and paired with a beautiful Lunta Malbec. There is no great dinner without a sweet goodbye and The Kitchen Table makes sure that you will not forget them by signing off with a fantastic dessert: Mango popsicle and a Three-layered Cheesecake together with a Portuguese Osborne Port. We asked a couple from New York how they liked the experience: “The devil is in

the details; every tiny part here is balanced, and savors are matched in an unmatched way. We are in praise.”

The secret formula

The Peruvian-born Roxanna Salinas and her husband Jan van Nes are the secret formula behind The Kitchen Table's success. You can tell making the customers happy is their main priority. The couple takes a personal approach to what they do, this is not about running a business as usual. This is more about making you feel welcomed home, as well as being pampered. They bring top hospitality, experience and authenticity to the table. Within this gourmet dinner concept the two blended the Peruvian culinary art of Roxanna's top kitchen team and Jan's expertise from The Kitchen Table. The result is one big trip of delight, indulge and tickling of your taste buds. The Kitchen Table welcomes you with open arms every Tuesday to Saturday. An evening at The Kitchen Table will be noted as unforgettable in your book of vacation memories, as it stands out from the regular island dinners.

The Kitchen Table is open from Tuesday to Saturday. Have a peak on their website www.thekitchentableinaruba.com or call them at +297-280 7117. □





Age for booster shot is now 30+

ORANJESTAD – The Department of Public Health (DVG) has announced that the minimum age required for the booster shot is 30+ starting January 11, 2022.

To get the booster shot, the person age 30 and up must have received the second vaccine over three months ago or had covid over three months ago.

The first and second vaccine and the booster shots are available at the Centro Libertador Betico Croes located in Santa Cruz. Since January 11, it is also available at the Operational Mobile Unit of the Crisis Management Office located at IMSan in San Nicolas. Both locations are open for vaccines from 8 am to 3 pm from Monday to Friday. □

Quarantine policy adapted

ORANJESTAD – Since January 7, 2022, the Crisis Team has adapted the quarantine and isolation policy.

Since December 30, 2021, the isolation and quarantine policies have changed to 5 days if the individuals have no symptoms. As of January 7, 2022, they introduced the exception for those in quarantine who live under the same roof as someone who tested positive.

There are now two exceptions;

1. If you have received the booster shot, there is no need to quarantine
2. If you contracted COVID in the past four weeks, you should not quarantine either.

The Crisis Team wants to remind everyone about the current safety protocols:

- Once a person receives a positive SARS-CoV-2 test result, the person should isolate for five days starting on the date of receiving the test result. This is to prevent direct contact with others in the same house.
- If the infected person still has symptoms after five days, he or she should remain in isolation until they no longer have any Covid related symptoms.
- You must complete the form once 24 hours have passed without symptoms.

All others living under the same roof, except for those mentioned above, should quarantine for five days starting on the last day of direct contact with an infected person and should also wear a face mask at all times at home. The protocols for isolation and quarantine are included in the email the DVG sends to all who tested positive. The DVG will no longer contact anyone in isolation or quarantine at home.

The DVG urges everyone to complete the form sent by email to inform them about the names of those who reside under the same roof and must quarantine. □



'Your Point of View'

By Philip Ellerin MD from Lynnfield MA

ORANJESTAD — Aruba Today encourages you to share your opinion with our readers through our newest column 'Your Point of view'.

Was there a certain situation that you think might have been handled differently? Or perhaps a really nice experience you went through? Maybe you want to just let our readers know how your overall experience was on the island while vacationing here despite the crisis. Let's exchange ideas and experiences related to Aruba.

Send us 'Your Point of View' with your name and where you are from to news@arubatoday.com. PS. Article will be screened prior to publication. No defamation of people or businesses will be allowed. Only constructive criticism/feedback.

For today we received a great message from Philip Ellerin MD from Lynnfield MA. He wrote:

"The Eagle Pharmacy here in Oranjestad is remarkable. I have had the opportunity of visiting the pharmacy on a number of occasions "unfortunately" but have found it to be streamlined and efficient on all visits. The personnel are welcoming and attentive and go out of their way to help. Their system should be a training ground for other countries." □

New prices for petroleum products January 12, 2022

ORANJESTAD – The Minister Economic Affairs, Communications and Sustainable Development announces the adjusted prices for petroleum products starting January 12, 2022:

Gasoline unleaded-premium	: 230,6 cent p/ltr. (- 8,4 cent)
Gasoil LS	: 195,0 cent p/ltr. (- 7,3 cent)
Kerosene	: 177,7 cent p/ltr. (- 6,1 cent)

BBO(turnover tax)/BAZV(Health tax)/BAVP is included in the prices. □

Millennial Money: How to have the wedding you want for less

By **SARA RATHNER**
of **NerdWallet** undefined

This one goes out to all you lovebirds who got engaged over the holidays and are now left planning a wedding with zero event-planning experience.

Somehow you're expected to craft a day that's traditional, yet modern. Well-attended, yet intimate. It's about you as a couple, but also shouldn't be offensive to any of your guests. And most crucially, don't overspend, but make sure it looks expensive.

If you focus your spending on what you and your guests will actually notice, and skip expensive things no one really cares about, you'll have a beautiful wedding without the debt.

ESTABLISH YOUR BUDGET

Before you plan anything, set a budget based on what you (and your families, if they're contributing) can afford. Make every decision with that number in mind, whether it's \$250, \$5,000 or \$50,000.

At its core, a wedding is simply "a celebration of love," says Jen Glantz, founder of the company Bridesmaid for Hire and an email newsletter called The First Years of Marriage. "In that celebration, there are no rules. ... Look at your wedding as a blank slate, an empty room. What do you want to



Associated Press

fill it with? What can you afford to fill it with?"

REEVALUATE TRADITIONAL 'MUST-HAVES'

"This is the biggest thing I have to tell everybody when they plan a wedding: You don't need anything at your wedding to get married," Glantz says. "If you don't want a cake, don't have a cake. If you don't want to wear a dress or a tuxedo, don't." Here are some other ways to save.

— **DECOR:** Guests remember the overall vibe, not the tiny details. "People at weddings are busy," Glantz says. "And when you're busy, you don't see things." Save on decor by renting it or scouring Buy Nothing groups on social media. Already-married friends may have leftover items they'd be happy to lend or pass along. There are even

services where you can share flowers with another couple getting married the same week.

— TRANSPORTATION:

"We're locked into this idea that the big stretch limo will get you to the church or get you to the venue," says Sheavonne Harris, owner and lead coordinator at Events by Sheavonne in New York City. But your guests will be seated inside when you arrive, so that car won't be a part of your grand entrance. Car services also require you to book for a minimum number of hours, according to Harris, so you'll end up paying for time you don't use. She recommends booking a ride-hailing service — yes, just like when you need a ride to the airport.

— **INVITATIONS, PROGRAMS AND MENUS:** All those paper items you painstakingly

select are going to go in the trash. Programs get left on chairs after the ceremony, and menus get tucked under plates after a quick scan. Even your invitations will get only a few months on guests' refrigerators before they head to the landfill. "They just tossed a \$10 bill into the garbage," Harris says. If you want the tradition of paper for a lower cost, skip the menus and programs. You can also find gorgeous paper invitations at certain online retailers for a fraction of the price. Many of these printing companies offer seasonal sales, too.

— **PARTY FAVORS:** Please, let 2022 be the year we cancel party favors. Guests leave them behind, and you'll be stuck with 75 personalized beer koozies for the rest of your life.

SPEND ON WHAT GETS NOTICED

— **PHOTOGRAPHY:** Long after your wedding, the only things you'll be left with are memories and pictures. This is not the task to assign to that cousin who took a few photography classes in college.

"If you want to put money into something, put it into photography," Harris says. "With photography, you definitely get what you pay for."

— THE GUEST EXPERIENCE:

Both Glantz and Harris recommend paying attention to weddings you attend as a guest before your own big day. What made you feel welcome? Guests won't remember that you got married in a picturesque historic mansion, but they will remember if that mansion had only one bathroom with a 20-minute line to use it. Cut expenses elsewhere to focus on food, drink, entertainment and guest comfort.

— PROFESSIONAL VENDORS:

Hiring a friend or doing a task yourself might feel like a money-saving move. Harris cautions that unlike a professional vendor, your friend likely won't have a backup plan for when the flower order is late or the sound equipment is on the fritz. And booking a pro at the last minute because that friend backs out will end up costing you even more.

USE REWARDS CREDIT CARDS

Many self-employed vendors don't accept credit cards, but whenever possible, pay for wedding costs with a rewards credit card. Not only can you earn cash back or travel rewards (hello, discounted honeymoon!), but should a vendor not honor its commitment to you, you can dispute charges. □

Outbreaks, bottlenecks expected to slow global growth in '22

By **PAUL WISEMAN**
AP Economics Writer
WASHINGTON (AP) —

The World Bank is downgrading its outlook for the global economy, blaming continuing outbreaks of COVID-19, a reduction in government economic support and ongoing bottlenecks in global supply chains.

The 189-country, anti-poverty agency forecasts worldwide economic growth of 4.1% this year, down from the 4.3% growth it was forecasting last June. It's also down from the 5.5% expansion it estimates the global economy tallied in 2021.

In its Global Economic Prospects report out Tuesday, the World Bank projects that the U.S. economy will grow 3.7% this year, down from 5.6% in 2021. It expects China, the world's second-biggest economy, to see growth decelerate to 5.1% in 2022 from 8% last year. The 19 European countries that share the euro currency are expected to collectively grow 4.2% this year, down from 5.2% in 2021. And Japan is forecast to register 2.9% growth in 2022, up from 1.7% last year. Emerging and developing economies are forecast to collectively grow 4.6% this

year, down from 6.3% in 2021.

The arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020 slammed global economic output. The world economy shrank by 3.4% in 2020. Massive relief provided by governments and super-low interest rates engineered by central banks — and eventually the rollout of vaccines — triggered an unexpectedly strong recovery last year. But the speed of the rebound caught businesses by surprise. They have scrambled to find raw materials and supplies to meet customer demand and the ships, trains and trucks



Associated Press

to transport them. Especially in the United States, they have struggled to find workers to fill job openings. One result has been the highest global inflation rates since 2008. Central banks are now reducing their support for economic growth and considered

raising interest rates to combat higher prices.

"The world economy is simultaneously facing COVID-19, inflation, and policy uncertainty, with government spending and monetary policies in uncharted territory," World Bank President David Malpass said. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 38 Physics

1 Some bits

adoptees 39 Bengal

5 Snaps beast

9 Enjoyed 40 Heart

avidly 41 Nuisance

11 Discover

12 Ignominy

13 Busy

14 "My country — of thee"

15 Give

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17 Artist's

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19 Approval

20 Takes

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21 River

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26 Some

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29 Singer

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30 Having a

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32 Copy

34 Painter

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35 Classical

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36 Fuming



Yesterday's answer

DOWN

1 Elbows

on the

table

2 Morality

topic

3 China buy

4 Bottom-

line figure

5 Milk buy

6 Scaly pet

7 Usual

practice

8 Haste

10 Bookish

sort

11 Backgam-

mon need

16 "You're on!"

flower

18 Walrus

feature

21 Car scar

23 Blow

one's top

24 Popular

soup

25 Beau

27 Impair

28 Declares

29 Fragrant

16 "You're on!"

flower

30 Works

leather

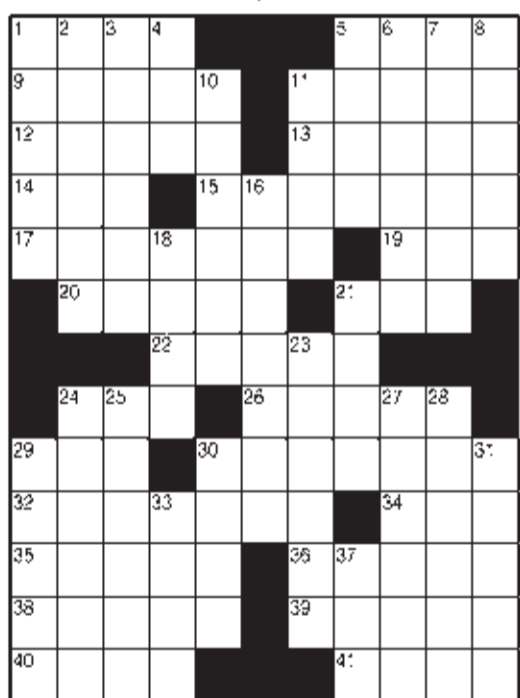
31 Bring to

bear

33 Watch

reading

37 Tear

A X Y D L B A A X R
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-12 CRYPTOQUOTE

B K X I N O W V G I Y V D M F V L O N D V

G I Y V D M X B D M G V F V D M J I Z B L X .

M G V Y X I N W G I Y V D M X B D

I I W W N J M . — R W . W I F V W M

O Y M G I Y X

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE GREAT ART TO LEARN MUCH IS TO UNDERTAKE A LITTLE AT A TIME. — JOHN LOCKE

Ford Maverick, Bronco win truck, utility of the year awards

By TOM KRISHER

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) —

For the second year in a row, vehicles from Ford Motor Co. took two of the three North American Car, Truck and Utility of the Year awards.

The company's Maverick compact pickup won truck of the year, while its Bronco off-road SUV earned the utility of the year. Honda's



Associated Press

redesigned Civic compact car won the car of the year.

Fifty automotive journalists from the U.S. and Canada are judges for the three awards, which are announced every January. They're chosen from dozens of candidates and must be new or substantially changed for the current model year. Automakers often use the awards in advertising.

The judges evaluate finalists on value, innovation, design, performance, safety, technology and driver satisfaction. The selection process started last summer.

In addition to the Bronco, Utility of the Year finalists included the GV70 from Hyundai's Genesis luxury brand, and the Hyundai Ioniq 5 electric SUV.

Truck finalists included the

Maverick as well as its main small pickup competitor, the Hyundai Santa Cruz. Also included was the Rivian R1T pickup from the electric vehicle startup.

In addition to the Civic, car finalists included the Lucid Air electric sedan, and the Volkswagen Golf GTI and R sports cars.

Fully electric vehicles were finalists in all three categories this year, but judges picked gas-powered or gas-electric hybrid vehicles.

Guidehouse Insights E-Mobility Principal Analyst Sam Abuelsamid, who is not among the jurors, said it's likely the more affordable prices of the Civic and Maverick appealed to the group.

The Maverick, with a hybrid powertrain, starts at \$19,995, while the Civic's base price is \$22,350. □

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WK 51 Garden view \$42,500
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WK 7 and 14 - all views

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2 Bed Garden view \$6,000
3 Bed Ocean view \$13,000

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1 Bed ocean View \$11,000

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2 Bed Ocean view \$9,500
1 Bed oceanfront \$9,000
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25 weeks remain \$17 K
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HTTA

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23 weeks remain \$17 K
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30 weeks remain \$ 9 K
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HTTA

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16 weeks remain \$ 7 K
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1 BR WK # 7 room # 338 C
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Price : \$18 K each
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2 BR Ocean View \$ 18 K
2 BR Ocean Front \$ 28 K
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HTTA

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HTTA

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Week 6- unit 7205 \$7000
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214942

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CDMOwner@gmail.com
U.S. Cell: (860)992-3890

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Editor
Caribbean Speed Printers N.V.
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RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

Assistant Director

Xiomara Arends

Editors

Liza Koolman (Management assistant)

Richard Brooks

Sales

Linda Reijnders

Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Pilar Flores

Columnists

Anthony Croes

Weststraat 22

T: 582-7800

E: news@arubatoday.com

W: www.arubatoday.com

@arubatoday



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Special rescues help ailing owners find pets' next home

By **LEANNE ITALIE**

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Who will take your pet when you die?

The question often doesn't have an easy answer, especially for ill or older people headed to residential nursing care or assisted living. During the pandemic, specialized rescue, advocacy and adoption services run by volunteers are trying to fill the void, one pet at a time.

Leaders in the small movement said the past couple of years have opened the eyes of many.

"The thing about COVID is a lot of people are thinking, I can't be guaranteed to be around forever. A lot more people are trying to make plans in advance, which is the best thing to do because unfortunately, a lot of people wait until they're in hospice or there's a desperate situation," said Amy Shever, founder and director of 2nd Chance 4 Pets in suburban Sacramento, California.

The number of pets surrendered to shelters due to caretaker health or death is up from 7.3% in 2009 to 10.2% during the pandemic, according to the Best Friends Network of thousands of public and private shelters, rescue groups and other animal welfare organizations in all 50 states.

The pets of seniors are often seniors themselves, languishing in shelters or the first to be euthanized after they're declared unadoptable, Shever said. They're routinely given up by relatives who can't take in a dog or cat. The life spans of other pets, such as parrots, are far longer, which sometimes scares off loved ones. Shever's focus is educating veterinarians and shelters on how they can get involved. Her organization also tries to help pet owners in need of direction. She urges owners to identify a committed caregiver, provide written instructions for a pet's routine and put a financial plan in place. Her group has distributed thousands of emergency-card door hangers, for instance,



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to pet food banks and animal welfare organizations so owners can make their wishes known.

Another organization, Pet Peace of Mind, works directly with about 250 hospices around the country to provide and train volunteers who care for pets of the seriously and terminally ill, said Dianne McGill, the president and founder in Salem, Oregon. Most of the hospices are providing home services, where pets are often giving comfort and support.

"These specialty volunteers bring pet care knowledge with them so they can do whatever is needed to help," she said. "So they're walking, feeding, playing, cleaning up or helping to arrange a plan for rehoming."

While providing pet care or adoption services often isn't top of mind for social workers or nurses, it's a huge emotional driving force for patients and loved ones living far away, McGill said.

"Care workers hear about the issues from family members," she said. "They say, my mom is really, really upset about what's going to happen to her pet. I live out of state. I can't help her. How do we get some pet care in place while she's navigating her end-of-life journey or when she passes?"

"I've got a million stories about patients who literally hung on until they heard

that their pet had received a new home," McGill said. Enter angels-on-earth like 79-year-old Kathy Reister. She adopted a 12-year-old Chihuahua named Jackson with the help of Tyson's Place Animal Rescue in Holland, Michigan. The nonprofit helps people with terminal illnesses find new homes for their pets. Reister, who has been diagnosed with congestive heart failure, had recently lost her own dog and was having a hard time at home alone when she took in Jackson last August.

"I've never been without a dog since about 1965," said the widow. "His previous owner had passed away." Soon after, Jackson was also diagnosed with congestive heart failure, and Tyson's Place stepped in with a grant to help Reister cover his medical bills. She promised to return him to the agency for rehoming should her health take a turn for the worse.

"Having him has really helped me want to continue to live and keep fighting," said Reister, of Grandville, Michigan. "I started walking one block down and one block back home with him. Now we walk at least 20, 25 minutes a day. He needs to walk and I need to walk. He's made such a big difference in my life."

Caitlin Koska, 31, and Michael White, 34, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, included

14-year-old Luna in their May 1 wedding after Koska adopted her through Tyson's Place around Thanksgiving 2020. Luna, also a Chihuahua, was their ring bearer.

"Her owner had gone into a nursing home and could no longer take care of her," Koska said. "She has a lot of dental issues, cataracts and very poor hearing. She's just the sweetest dog. Everybody who knows her loves her."

Jill Bannink-Albrecht founded Tyson's Place about six years ago. It services the entire state of Michigan, working directly with a pet owner before rehoming becomes an urgent matter, or with family members after a death, using a small network of foster homes. For Koska, Tyson's Place took care of extensive dental work for Luna before she was adopted.

"I used to work for a high-kill animal shelter, and I knew what happened to the old dogs when they came in. I remember one dog who animal control literally picked up from the side of his dead owner's body, and he didn't even have an opportunity to be adopted. He was put to sleep because we didn't have space," Bannink-Albrecht said.

Now, hospices and social workers refer patients to Tyson's Place. Bannink-Albrecht is struggling to expand her foster reach.

"I just can't meet the demand for this kind of service, especially when it comes to cats," she said. "In the last two months, I've turned away 40 cats that meet our mission just because we don't have a place to put them."

Bannink-Albrecht knows of just a few other rescues like hers. One, in Canada, also needs help.

Angela Rafuse, 27, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, founded My Grandfather's Cat on May 18, her grandfather's birthday. He died in 2019 and left behind his grumpy 14-year-old cat, Mackenzie.

"She was my grandmother's best friend and when she passed away, my grandfather took care of her for the next year before he passed away," Rafuse said. "He wouldn't put his name on the list for a nursing home knowing nobody would take the cat, who has the grumpiest meow I've ever heard."

Rafuse promised her grandfather she would take Mackenzie. She began posting TikTok videos of their adventures. One video, of Mackenzie scratching Rafuse's face as she held her up to the camera, has been viewed nearly a million times.

"Then so many people started sharing stories with us about how their grandparents' cats ended up in shelters and how their grandparents worry about what will happen to their cats or their dogs because there's nowhere to take them," Rafuse said. "I've worked at a nonprofit for the past four years so I thought, it should be pretty easy to find resources to help these people. Nothing existed that empowered a senior and helped them arrange this and empowered their family. Everything was just shelters."

After she launched, emails asking for help and offering donations rolled in, but she didn't have enough foster homes to meet demand. She's working to expand. One of Rafuse's goals is to help keep a pet at home until the final moment. □

Gold means confidence, less pressure for US curler Shuster

By JIMMY GOLEN
AP Sports Writer

John Shuster won't be catching anyone by surprise at these Olympics. The five-time Olympian is back to defend his curling gold medal in Beijing, and the target on his back will be almost as big as the one on the ice. Four years after surviving five straight elimination matches to win it all in Pyeongchang the Americans are among the favorites to medal again.

"I definitely feel less pressure," Shuster said after his victory in the U.S. curling trials. "The success last time for me, winning an Olympic gold, is the top of the mountain. And no matter how you finish in the other Olympics, it doesn't matter. "I think I feel less pressure," he said, "but I think I have supreme confidence."

Shuster won bronze in 2006 as the lead for Pete Fenson's team — the first-ever U.S. Olympic curling medal. Then he left to form his own rink, earning a trip to Vancouver but performing so badly that he benched himself. After finishing 10th in 2010 — dead last — Shuster won the U.S. trials again four years later but managed just a ninth place in Sochi. When USA Curling put together a high performance camp of the country's top 10 players, Shuster didn't make the cut.

So the most decorated Olympian in American curling history scraped together a foursome — calling themselves "Team Rejects" — and not only beat the



Associated Press

federation-backed squads in the U.S. trials but won gold in Korea.

With 2018 teammates John Landsteiner and Matt Hamilton, and Olympic rookie Chris Plys, Shuster is hoping to avoid the slow starts of previous Winter Games. Longtime curling powers Britain and Canada will be there if they stumble.

BABY BUMP

Tabitha Peterson is heading to her second straight Olympics — her first as the skip of the U.S. women's team.

A Twin Cities native, Peterson threw third for Nina Roth's team in Pyeongchang. When Roth took maternity leave the following season, Peterson moved up to skip, the team captain who not only throws the last and most

important stones but is also the final word on strategy throughout the match.

"It definitely is different, just in terms of my role on the team," Peterson said. "I've had to kind of rethink the way I think the game, my role, my approach, my preparation. (And) what I do off the ice -- there's more strategic learning."

Roth is back at vice-skip, throwing third, with fellow 2018 holdover Becca Hamilton second. Olympic rookie Tara Peterson, Tabitha's sister, is the lead, throwing first. "It's been amazing, this group of girls," Tabitha Peterson said. "We're so happy to be going together, no matter what our roles are."

The U.S. women have never won an Olympic curling medal. They went 4-5 in

2018 and failed to qualify for the playoffs.

DOUBLE DUTY

A handful of curlers will be among the busiest athletes at the Olympics.

Plys will compete in the mixed doubles event with partner Vicky Persinger before turning his attention to the men's tournament — meaning he could be on the ice for 18 days in a row, sometimes two sessions per day.

Others doing double duty are Britain's Jennifer Dodds and Bruce Mouat, Italy's Amos Mosaner and Sweden's Oskar Eriksson. (Norway's Magnus Nedregotten is an alternate for the men's competition; China and Canada were still filling out their teams.)

BACK FOR MORE

It's not just Shuster's squad

that is trying to repeat. All of the medal-winning teams from Pyeongchang are back for another try, with some minor shuffling in the lineups.

In the men's field, Sochi bronze medalist and Pyeongchang runner-up Niklas Edin is back to complete his set of Olympic prizes. The Swiss team skipped by Benoît Schwarz that won bronze in 2018 is back but with a new third, Sven Michel.

Anna Hasselborg's foursome will defend its Olympic championship in the women's division, and Japan's Team Fujisawa is back after winning bronze four years ago. South Korea's Team Kim, silver medalists at home in Pyeongchang, is back, with Kim Cho-hi stepping in as second.

Canada's Kaitlyn Lawes and John Morris won mixed doubles gold in Korea -- the only curling medal for powerhouse Canada in Korea -- but the coed trials were canceled because of the pandemic, delaying the selection of a team for Beijing. Silver medalists Jenny Perret and Martin Rios of Switzerland and third place finishers Kristin Skaslien and Magnus Nedregotten of Norway are also hoping to move up the podium.

PANTSED

The Norwegian team that became a sensation for its psychedelic pants over the last three Olympiads has broken up, depriving the curling field of a beloved dose of sartorial personality. □

Red Wings hire Nicklas Lidstrom as VP of hockey operations

DETROIT (AP) — The Detroit Red Wings hired Nicklas Lidstrom as vice president of hockey operations Tuesday, tapping one of the franchise's great players. General manager Steve Yzerman said his former teammate will be based in his native Sweden and involved in every aspect of helping him run the organization. Lidstrom's job du-

ties will include evaluating players with the Red Wings, on other NHL teams, in the AHL and Europe as well as on amateur levels.

Detroit drafted Lidstrom with the No. 53 pick overall in 1989 and he spent his 20 NHL seasons with the franchise, becoming one of the best defensemen of all time.

He won seven Norris tro-

phies to trail only Bobby Orr's record total of eight.

Lidstrom retired in 2012, his No. 5 Red Wings jersey was raised two seasons later and he was a first-ballot Hockey Hall of Famer in 2015.

The 12-time All-Star helped Detroit win four Stanley Cups from 1997 to 2008, when he became the first captain of an NHL champi-



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onship team born in Europe. He helped the Swedes win Olympic gold in 2006, earn-

ing a spot in the Triple Gold Club after also winning a world championship. □

Climate change: Athletes flag the dangers of manmade snow

By **MARTHA BELLISLE**

Associated Press

A British skier crashes through wooden fencing on a downhill corner and slams into a pole, breaking his leg. An American hits an icy patch at the bottom of a hill and crashes into a fence, breaking one ski and twisting the other, also breaking his leg.

Another American, training before a biathlon race, slides out on an icy corner and flies off the trail into a tree, breaking ribs and a shoulder blade and punctures a lung.

These were not scenes from high speed Alpine or ski cross events. They happened on cross country ski and biathlon tracks made with artificial snow.

Many top athletes say crashes like these are becoming more common as climate change reduces the availability of natural snow, forcing racers to compete on tracks with the manmade version. Olympic and World Cup race organizers have come to rely on snow-making equipment to create a ribbon of white through the hills since natural snowfall is less reliable. Johanna Talihaarm, an Estonian Olympic biathlete, said racing on manmade



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snow comes with risks.

"Artificial snow is icier, therefore faster and more dangerous," she said. "It also hurts more if you fall outside of the course when there is no fluffy snowbank, but a rocky and muddy hard ground." Manmade snow has a higher moisture content, making it ice up quickly, skiers and experts say.

"It can be really rock hard out there and falling can feel like falling on concrete, and so it does make it a little bit more danger-

ous than if it was natural snow conditions," said Chris Grover, head cross country coach for the U.S. Ski Team. Some venues even make snow and then store it under wood chips through the summer and spread it around a track when it gets cold. Artificial snow, welcome as it may be, does not get better with age. Race organizers should take that into consideration when designing courses, skiers and experts say.

"It's pretty universally recognized that courses are firm-

er and faster than before," said Gus Schumacher, a member of the U.S. cross country team.

John Aalberg, a former Olympic cross country skier who designs Olympic Nordic ski courses, including for the Beijing Games, said they always consider icy conditions when designing a course. He said a bigger safety issue was the change in race formats from individual starts to mass starts.

"When you ski one-by-one like they used to do in the

'90s, you could have gnarlier downhill corners because they came one at a time," he said.

Unlike Alpine equipment, cross country skis don't have metal edges. They're designed to be thin and lightweight for climbing hills and gliding over flats. The boots are flexible and connect to the ski with a single metal bar under the toe. Nordic skiers don't use the edge of the ski to navigate around a corner. Instead, they take fast baby steps to get around the curve.

All of that is more difficult on manmade snow.

Olympic gold medalist and U.S. Nordic ski team member Jessie Diggins said she has reached 76 kilometers per hour (47 mph) going downhill on manmade snow "and it is scary because most of our race trails are built for natural snow." "I think it is getting a little more dangerous and I've noticed at the World Cup when it is manmade snow, it is scary because instead of sliding on snow you're sliding on ice," added Diggins, the overall World Cup winner for the 2020-21 season. "I think we're seeing a higher percentage of falls. I feel it is a little more dangerous now." □



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A look at what's happening in European soccer on Wednesday:

SPAIN

Barcelona and Real Madrid meet in their second "clásico" of the season in the semifinals of the Spanish Super Cup. The competition returns to Saudi Arabia after being played in Spain last year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Barcelona is expected to be boosted by the returns of Pedri González and Ferran Torres, who rejoined the squad in time for the match after testing positive for the coronavirus. Madrid will be led by the red-hot duo of Karim Benzema and Vinícius Júnior. The other semifinal will be played Thursday between defending Spanish league

Barça-Madrid in Super Cup, Chelsea-Spurs 2nd leg

champion Atlético Madrid and Copa del Rey runner-up Athletic Bilbao. Madrid made it to the "Final Four" after finishing second to Atlético in the league last season. Barcelona qualified as the Copa del Rey champion.

ENGLAND

Chelsea takes a 2-0 lead over Tottenham into the second leg of the League Cup semifinals. Tottenham has the advantage of being home for the return match but will be without key forward Son Heung-min, who has a muscle injury in his leg and is unlikely to be back until next month. Chelsea is looking to reach the final of the

competition for the first time since 2019, when it lost to Manchester City on penalties, and win it for the sixth time. Tottenham was the runner-up to City last season and won the last of its four League Cup titles in 2008. In the Premier League, West Ham hosts last-place Norwich in a game that has been rearranged after initially being postponed last month because of COVID-19 cases in Norwich's squad.

ITALY

Serie A champion Inter Milan and Italian Cup winner Juventus meet in the Super Cup. Juventus has won the competition a record nine times, including last sea-

son, but Inter coach Simone Inzaghi has beaten the Bianconeri in both his previous matches in the competition — as Lazio coach in 2017 and '19. The match will be staged at San Siro, where Inter plays its home games. Inter leads Serie A and has 11 points more than fifth-place Juventus, which will have gained confidence by rallying for a 4-3 win at Roma from 3-1 down on Sunday. Goalkeeper Wojciech Szczęsny saved a late penalty in that match but will be on the bench against Inter as he has only recently had his second dose of the vaccine against coronavirus. □